

Contributed

THE EXIGENCY AND HOW TO MEET IT.

By Rev. R. C. Reed, D. D.

Two things need to be said and I should like to say both of them with all the plainness and vigor possible. One is that our Church is suffering sadly for the want of more ministers; and the other is that we can do, and should do, more than we are doing to supply the deficiency.

1. There is nothing new in the first statement. It has been said over and over again with an iteration and reiteration that has already grown monotonous. But for all that it needs to be kept constantly before the mind of the Church. We ought not to lose sight for one instant of the fact that the need for more ministers is a pressing one, and a matter of vital importance. In the aggregate, thousands of our people are deprived of the ordinances necessary to the nourishment of their spiritual life, and essential to the maintenance and enlargement of the Kingdom of Christ. Decline, decay and ultimate dissolution are the results which logically and inevitably follow from vacancy.

The conviction is forcing itself on my mind that if Christ ordained our system of government, we are not working it according to the Author's intent. It can not be admitted that Christ provided for His Church an organization which when administered according to His will exhibits a defect at the very point where a defect is most fatal to its efficiency. It can not be admitted that He who redeemed the world, and ordained that His redemption should be made effective through preaching, left His Church with no means of supplying an adequate number of preachers. It can not be admitted that Christ who laid upon His followers the duty of giving to His cause a world-wide conquest, left them helpless to provide an efficient leadership for the onward march. Either we have failed to apprehend the plan of Christ, or we are signally failing to work it properly. If any government should organize an army for conquest, and should make no provision whereby the army could be sufficiently officered, the wisdom of the government would be discredited.

Of course, Christ is not responsible for the inefficient, crippled condition in which our Church finds itself. This crippled condition is chronic with us. We have never had a sufficient number of preachers to adequately man our organization. The present differs from some other periods only in that our lame condition is more pronounced. Our defect is not only a radical one, but apparently a permanent one. If it be in reality and necessarily a permanent one, we have grave reason to fear that in our organization we have missed the mind of the Master.

2. We are not doing all that we can do and ought to do to remedy the defect. Why? I believe the principal cause of our failure is that we lean too far to the Quaker theory of a call to the ministry—we passively wait for the spirit to give the call. We are the victims of a false mysticism; we expect God to interpose directly and signify His will to those whom He

wishes to preach the Gospel. No human instrumentality must mediate the call. This would mar the evidence of its divine source. We demand that the preacher shall have the same kind of heavenly authentication for his call to preach that Paul claimed for his apostleship; he must receive it "neither from men, nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised him from the dead."

Have we scriptural ground for such a view of a call to the ministry? No doubt the call, if a genuine one, is from God. But not more so than the sinner's call to discipleship. We hold that every sinner is saved through effectual calling. What is effectual calling? It is the work of God's Spirit. We can no more give an effectual call to a sinner and bring him into union with Christ than we can give a Christian an effectual call and bring him into the ministry. The one of these is as much of God as the other. Now in the case of the sinner we recognize it as our duty, our imperative duty, yea, our supreme duty to mediate the call. This is our first business as preachers to cry "Ho every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters." Why should it be any less our duty to serve as the medium of God's call to the ministry? I believe it is our duty, and a duty pressing, urgent, imperative just in proportion to the exigencies of the case. When we see the Kingdom of God suffering, sorely suffering for the want of more ministers, we should sound the call with persistent earnestness. We should pray the Lord of the Harvest, but we should do as we do in all other matters, use the appropriate means to answer our prayers.

I am not forgetful of the fact that our General Assembly has enjoined it on pastors and sessions to look out suitable young men and lay before them the claims of the ministry. I doubt not this injunction is to some extent being obeyed. But I do not believe that it has yet taken hold of the heart and conscience of the Church as it should. I believe that comparatively few of our pastors and sessions are discharging anything like their full duty in this respect.

There is no reason why this duty should be restricted to pastors and sessions. Touching the call to the sinner the injunction of the Bible is "let him that heareth say come." It is permitted to every Christian to offer his services to voice the divine call to repentance. Why should not every Christian, impressed with the need of more preachers offer his services to voice God's call to the ministry? Surely if the whole Church would resolve itself into a recruiting agency for the army of Christ, it would not be without a divine warrant in doing so. But if for the army, why not for the officers of the army? I believe the whole Church should bestir itself to secure a more numerous and a more efficient preaching force. Only let the Church do this and we shall find that Christ did not launch an organization defective at the most vital point.

A gentleman in Yorkshire one day took his little boy out for a walk; but the boy, from some cause or other, got lost, and, meeting a policeman, tearfully asked: "Please, master, have you seen a man without a little boy? 'Cause, if you have, I'm that little boy."—Dundee Weekly News.